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A Woman's Koan

From birth we have the world described to us by our parents, and most girls are informed in a myriad of ways that they are somehow inferior to men. They then grow up with the negative and false assumption that they are somehow lacking as human beings. Anyone who becomes one with his own nature knows, through his experience, that there is nothing animate or inanimate that is not perfect and whole just as it is. The Precepts of the Buddhas are actually guidelines on how to avoid inadequacy which is at the root of suffering. If you live with the basic assumption that you are lacking as a human being, then you will continually be causing yourself and others to suffer. First we say "I lack", and this contains within it "I want" which is the foundation of greed. Women want to fill up the hole they feel within and they try to do this by collecting friends or material possessions or by trying to possess their children. They believe men are superior and consequently resent them. They are jealous of them and that jealousy leads to nagging, guilt-provoking and emasculating behaviour towards men. Jealous women are especially resentful of a woman who is successful, because the excuse they use for their behaviour is that they are weak and inferior and they are shaken seeing a woman who does not live by this delusion. "Do not covet. The doer, the doing and that which has the doing done to it are immaculate; therefore there is no desire. It is the same doing as that of the Buddhas." It is very sad that most people spend their entire lives trying to fill a hole that never existed in the first place.

To find the Buddha within one must sit still in the midst of one's cravings and jealousies. You sit still and watch your thoughts (and this includes emotions) arise and pass. You must be open enough to

admit possible error on your part. You must look at the world with fresh eyes so that words such as liberated and enslaved, competent and incompetent, success and failure no longer have their hold over you. Instead, they are just more thoughts that arise and pass. Then you may be lucky enough to realize that you are your only oppressor. We are no longer children forced to believe the opinions of our parents, teachers and friends. We have our own minds and hearts with which to see the world and if we persist in accepting the world's delusions then we have only ourselves to blame. We train by trying to remain still within. When we become disturbed by anything we ask ourselves, "What is it within me that needs working on so that I will not become disturbed by this?" To be truly free, women must give up blaming others for how they are; they must be willing to give up their right to complain. One of the problems with the Women's Liberation Movement is that there is so much complaining and so little accepting the responsibility that you are how you are because each moment you choose to be this way.

My master, Rev. Jiyu Kennett, Roshi, tells a story about hearing a head nurse lecture to a class of nurses telling them she wanted them to be first-rate nurses and not second-rate doctors. Rev. Kennett tells her female students that they should be first-rate women and not second-rate men. Many women today can only think of liberation in terms of what men get up to that they cannot. Rev. Kennett has also said that although we heap inadequacies upon our women we give them the most important job in existence, the raising of our young. Yet many see raising children as drudgery and enslavement. Only the discriminating mind sees drudgery and inferior work. What is important is that you give yourself wholeheartedly to whatever you are doing. When we think someone else has a

better job or that ours is drudgery, then our minds become scattered and we cannot participate wholly in life. If you can give yourself completely to whatever you are doing in each moment without worry of past, future or the opinions of others, then you will discover very quickly if what you are doing is the best thing for you. You may find that you would prefer being a lawyer, or a stock broker, or a housewife, or anything you want. But you will not view any other job as inferior or drudgery, because you will know that every activity is an opportunity to work on yourself and find peace within.

The liberation of a woman is a spiritual matter of her own heart. Equal opportunities in jobs, education, etc. are very important, but they will not bring real liberation. True freedom occurs whenever a woman takes a very honest look at how she views herself and the world and sets out to transcend her negativity into positivity, when she refuses to accept second-best in herself.

Rev. Gyozan Singer.
(Eugene Priory,
Oregon, U.S.A.)

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APOLOGY:-

We apologise for the lateness of this edition of the newsletter. The next edition is due next month.

Buddhism.

Usually we come to Buddhism because of some pain in our lives. In Zen we would be told to sit and face the wall. At first this might seem a strange thing to do - the connection between just sitting and solving a live problem is not obvious. However having admitted to ourselves that we could be wrong, we decide to lay aside our opinions for a while and give another way, Buddhism, a chance.

Gradually, through persevering with our practice, we find our anxieties decrease. They do not go away completely perhaps but when they do appear they have not the same power to drag us around anymore. We enjoy some freedom to move about in our lives.

Often at this point we decide to take a rest from training. Before long the peace goes, we are unable to hold onto it, and our anxieties reappear.

Then we are faced with the uncomfortable fact that it is our fault, because we slackened off practice. Now, instead of blaming other people and circumstances for our problems, we begin to learn to accept responsibility for the state of our lives. We cannot hide behind ignorance and our excuses to avoid training become more obvious. While we reject this knowledge and try to bury our head in the sand, our lives become very painful. Once we accept it then our problems can be used positively, showing us when something needs to be done and pointing us in the direction of doing it.

John Adams.

One Continuous Mistake.

"Dogen-zenji used to say 'Shoshaku Jushaku'. Shaku generally means 'mistake' or 'wrong'. Shoshaku jushaku means to 'succeed wrong with wrong' or 'one continuous mistake'. According to Dogen, one continuous mistake can also be Zen. A Zen master's life could be said to be so many years of shoshaku jushaku. This means so many years of one single-minded effort."

When we are first ordained as a trainee we are told that we are leaving the 'drifting, wandering world'. On first coming to Zen this may well be what we know of life. Small and ineffectual we have been carried by the forces and cross-currents of our lives like bits of driftwood, or large and strong we have battled against the circumstances of our lives, in either case our lives have lacked flow and harmony. T.S. Elliott puts this well, 'Men, leaves and bits of paper blown in and out of time.' We look into the mirror and see the traces of our action on the world, grazings of superficiality and scars of violence, in our heart of hearts we know the poverty of our action, that it could have been much better. Do we really live life as a thirsty man drinks a cup of water? So we do sange, make an act of contrition before the Buddhas. Dogen says "contrition before the Buddhas brings purification and salvation, true conviction and earnest endeavour." We are now faced with putting the precepts into practice, of truly grasping our wills to do so, being sidetracked by neither guilt nor complacency.

But daily life can be very difficult, many things happen which can so easily knock us off balance, leaving our initial enthusiasm dented and our wills on the floor. When Roshi went to

Japan she was shown the kyosaku (awakening stick) and told "Daily life is the kyosaku". Suzuki says "When we reflect on what we are doing in our everyday life we are always ashamed of ourselves. One of my students wrote to me saying, 'You sent me a calendar and I am trying to follow the good mottoes which appear on each page. But the year has hardly begun and already I have failed!' Sometimes we even become a little self-obsessed by our failure as we stumble around tripping ourselves up. In our state of unawareness, homo non sapiens, we resemble those clowns at the circus with the long boots, either our boots are too big for us or we're too big for our boots. We sit down and the seat falls through the chair (it was loose and we didn't bother to fix it), we stand up and a plank hits our head (we weren't looking where we were going). Or like Cinderella we slave away and wait for the Prince to come with the correct fitting slipper and recognition of our True Worth. Or perhaps we would like to be like the Old Masters, simple and rough hewn pieces of wood but with exquisite graining, and instead we find that we're riddled with complexities and knots, not very promising pieces of wood at all, it will certainly take more than a Master Craftsman to craft anything out of us. And again our hopes are dashed, the bubble bursts and underneath we bleed. What shall we do, what shall we ever do?

"You must show gratitude and you must show it truly, in the only real way, in your daily life."

So once more we set out and start from the beginning again. In the monastery we are fortunate in having many constant reminders to point us in the direction of gratitude, we bow, we fold our mats in a certain way, we walk up to the shrine in a certain way and these are all fine practices. But in essence the walk up to the shrine is no different to the walk to the television set and folding our mats is no different to folding the sheets on laundry day, these are

opportunities to express our sincerity in daily life. When we truly try to open ourselves and be of service in daily life our life becomes filled with a different spirit even amidst our difficulties. The difficulties themselves can then become the spurs to our practice. You may, like me, have a problem with doubts, for example, which means that I must work harder at bringing forth the heart of faith; or you may, like me, be rather wilful and stubborn, so I must learn to put my determination into practice. When we open ourselves in this way, then life can become a very moving experience. Then we will see that we were never mistaken, it was our obsession with fame and gain that made us think that way, and that was certainly a very seductive way of thinking even when it made a tangle of our lives. On the other hand we certainly weren't right either, this is just complacency. And most of all, we just weren't enough.

Jitsuyu Evans.

PRIORY NEWS AND EVENTS.

Fees. Because of the way costs have been rising and the fact that we have been running at something of a loss we have had to increase our prices so that a week-end retreat will now cost £7.50, a week retreat £15 and for people staying longer periods £35 per month. To help us to save money, when you write to us please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

Jukai. During the Jukai retreat at the end of March, 10 people took Lay-ordination. Altogether there were 30 people on the retreat including Hofuku and Kyosei Hughes who came up from the London Zen Priory and contributed a great deal to the retreat which went very well.

Hossen. On Monday 14th. April Rev. Daishin Morgan completed his term as Chief Junior, successfully engaging in a mondo ceremony with all trainees.

Ordination. On the 24th. of April Carolyn Evans was ordained as a priest trainee and given the name Houn Jitsuyu. We offer her our congratulations and good wishes for her training.

New Building. Site clearing operations are well underway but they are proving more difficult than expected. We have discovered several small coal mines running underneath the site and we are having to excavate them and then fill them with hoggin and then cast a 'raft' type foundation on top. All of this means much more digging than we had anticipated, but the work is progressing well.

Buddha's Birthday. On May 8th. we celebrated the Buddha's Birthday with a ceremony in the morning followed by a lunchtime feast. In the evening Daiji held a celebration in Newcastle for the local Zazen group.

Retreats. Week-end retreats will be held on 5th. and 6th. of July and the 30th. and 31st. of August. There will be week-long retreats from June 21st. to 29th. (this will be a Jukai retreat for those wishing to become Buddhists and those who would like to reaffirm their commitment), August 2nd. to 10th. and September 20th. to 28th. We are getting booked up well in advance so if you would like to come please write to the Guestmaster as soon as possible enclosing a stamped addressed envelope. There will also be an inter-religious retreat at Spode House conducted by Daiji and Fr. Stephen Gowers OCR. The address is Spode House, Hawksway Priory, Rugeley, Staffordshire. (Phone Armitage 490112) between 18th. to the 25th. of July. Applications to attend should be made to the Warden, the cost will be £23 for shared accomodation and £28 for a single room.

Newsletter Subscriptions. A large number of subscriptions are now overdue. Could people please let us know if they wish to renew their subscriptions. We will endeavour to let you know with the next newsletter if your subscription has run out.

Throssel Hole Priory Journal.

The Throssel Hole Priory Journal is published bi-monthly with six issues a year. The subscription rate is £2 per annum. Please send your subscription to:-

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Selling Water By The River

The Priory is selling copies of Kennett Roshi's book "Selling Water By The River A Manual of Zen Training." The book includes Kennett Roshi's explanation of Zen meditation, training and Koans, as well as translations from Dogen and Keizan, the two great founders of Soto Zen in Japan. Also included are the scriptures and ceremonial of Soto Zen, much of which is used here at the Priory.

Prices including postage and packing are:-

Paperback £1.25 (temporarily out of stock.)
Hardback £2.50.

The Priory is also selling booklets on Zen Meditation, these contain extracts from Kennett Roshi's book, extracts from some of her lectures and basic information on how to sit, how to make your own meditation cushions and benches etc. Price including postage 40p.

The Prior and the Editor are not responsible for the individual opinions of writers contributing to the Journal.

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